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LIZZIE'S ELOPEMENT.

"Liz! Lizzie!"
Mrs. Blake stood at the foot of the stairs, with her eyes fixed upon the door facing it above.

"Lizzie! Elizabeth!" she called again, but more sharply this time.

But still there was no reply, and she went back into the kitchen with a vexed look, and began to beat an omelet for breakfast.

The outer door opened, and Deacon Blake came briskly in from the garden.

"Fine morning!" he remarked, as he looked cheerfully around. "If this kind o' weather continues there'll be plenty of strawberries in a day or two. Some of 'em are beginning to turn already. Breakfast already. Breakfast ready, Cassie?"

"No," answered his wife, somewhat retulantly, "and not likely to be this fifteen minutes. I've had all the work on my own hands this morning."

"Where's Liz?"

"Not come down yet, and it's nearly seven o'clock. She's getting lazier every day, and we allow her to have her own way too much."

"I s'pose she's tired out with the frolic at Cynthia's last night. Let her have what rest she needs."

"She's had as much as is good for her by this time, I guess. Here, Patty," turning to a small help, who was bustling about the kitchen, very much in everybody's way, "Run upstairs and wake her. She can be ready in time for breakfast, and it's so late to-day. Where's Tom?"

"Not back from the mill yet. Time he should be," said the deacon, looking from the window.

Patty, in her zeal, dashed upstairs like a small tornado.

They could hear her rattling the door knob and calling—

"Miss Lizzie! Miss 'Liz'beth! Yer aunt says to git up. It's mos' seven o'clock, and breakfast mos' ready."

No answer came.

Then followed an irregular drumming on the door, and Mrs. Blake, with an anxious face, turned to her husband.

"Joseph, I hope there's nothing the matter with Liz. Why don't she answer?"

Patty came running down with big eyes. "Pleas'm, I can't wake her, and the door's bolted!"

Before Patty had concluded Mrs. Blake was half way upstairs, followed by her husband.

"Lizzie!" he called, in stentorian tones which would have awakened the soundest sleeper.

Then, after pausing for an answer, he said, hurriedly—

"Cassie, have you a key that will unlock this door? No! Then run down, quick, and bring up my box of tools."

His hands trembled a little, as with the assistance of the tools he pried open the door—no difficult task, as the lock was slight.

His wife stepped hastily within the room and uttered an exclamation at once of relief and alarm.

"She isn't here. The bed hasn't been slept in. Why, Joseph, she hasn't been home all night!"

Mr. Blake stared around blankly as he took off his hat and wiped the drops from his brow.

"Maybe," he said, "maybe she's stayed all night over to Cynthia's."

"Why should she? It isn't far, and there was nothing to keep her."

"Unless she was sick," he suggested, anxiously.

"In that case they'd have let us know last night!"

Mr. Blake suddenly paused, and suddenly sank into a chair.

"Joseph, I hope—I hope it isn't that young man from the city—that Orville Parker, you know?"

"Why, Cassandry, she'd never think of such a thing!"

"She might! There's no knowing what Liz would do when she's in one of her freakish moods. Parker was desperately attentive to her when he first came here, but she didn't care to have anything to do with him, so he went over to Elvira Jane. But lately she seems to have been encouraging him, and Tom had a pretty sharp talk about it Sunday night, when Parker walked home with her from church. I took Tom's side—I never could abide that stuck-up city clerk—and he got vexed, and said she'd never be good for aught, and so when she pleased, and if we didn't want her, she could sup at

herself in the city—for that Parker had told her there were elegant young ladies of good families and education employed in the stores there."

"And what did you say?"
"I was vexed, and said she could go when she'd a mind to; but of course she knew I didn't mean it."

"How could she know that? Cassie, Cassie, I've warned you more than once or twice that your impatient temper would bring trouble at last. Elizabeth is like her poor mother was—proud and easy hurt. And she's not been long enough with us since her mother died to get familiar with your little irritable ways, and to know that at the bottom there's a good and true woman's heart. Cassie, I doubt but you've driven the poor child off."

Mrs. Blake burst into tears.

"What's to be done, Joseph? God knows Lizzie is as dear to me as if she was my own! And I did hope," she added, in a lower tone—"I did hope to be able to call her mine some time. Tom!"

And here she choked and burst into fresh sobs.

"Yea, yea! Tom will be dreadfully cut up by this," said the old man, slowly shaking his head as the two proceeded down stairs. "But I wish he'd hurry home now, for until he comes I hardly know what's to be done."

"Hain't we better send over to Cynthia's? Maybe they'd know something that would serve for a clew, since Lizzie was there last night. No doubt she took the eleven o'clock train for the city. Stay I'll write a line to Joe, and ask him to step to the hotel and find out whether Parker had left there."

The hasty line was written and despatched by Patty, who had all this time looked on with wide open eyes and mouth. "Now, Patty, run for your life!" said her mistress, and she gave her the bit of paper.

Patty ran—only stopping once to tell somebody whom she met that Miss Lizzie had run away to get married.

In ten minutes she returned, accompanied by Mrs. Blake's sister, Mrs. Cynthia Harden, and her daughter, Elvira Jane.

Mrs. Harden, a portly lady, was all out of breath, and Elvira Jane, slender and willowy, was pale and agitated.

"Cassandra," gasped Mrs. Harden, as she dropped heavily into a chair, "what is all this I hear? Patty says Lizzie's run away to get married, but I can't believe it's true."

And then Mrs. Blake explained what had occurred.

"She left my house last night about half-past nine," said Mrs. Harden, growing very red, while her daughter became equally pale. "Wasn't Tom with her, Elvira Jane?"

"No, ma. Tom and she quarrelled the first part of the evening, because she danced with—with Mr. Parker."

And Elvira Jane's voice trembled as she spoke the name.

"I thought so. They've undoubtedly run off together, or perhaps he's helped to get her off to the city."

"I wouldn't have believed it of Elizabeth!" said Mrs. Harden, with indignant emphasis. "I wouldn't have believed it of any girl that she could play such an underhand part. Why, she knew that Elvira Jane was as good as engaged to Orville Parker."

At this Miss Harden's feelings, hitherto suppressed, became too acute for endurance, and she sat down on the kitchen settee and burst into hysterical weeping.

"Don't cry, Elvira Jane!" said her Uncle Joseph kindly. "If the fellow's capable of acting in this way, he ain't worth shedding a tear for."

"There'll be something to shed besides tears when Joe comes to hear of it!" said Mrs. Harden, savagely. "He ain't one to see his sister put upon in this way, Joe isn't."

Just here there was a knock at the outer kitchen door, which, being opened, admitted two or three of the nearest neighbors, who had come to obtain information and administer consolation to the family in their trouble.

For by this time, thanks to Patty, half the village knew that Deacon Blake's pretty niece, who had made his home so bright in the few months that she had lived with them, and who everybody had decided was to marry his son Tom, had run off and got married to the dandy dry goods clerk lately imported from the city.

"Well, I'm awfully cut up about it, I'm sure," said Mrs. Peters, the wheelwright's wife, as she folded her hands on her ample chest and solemnly shook her head. "I wish I could say something to comfort you, Mrs. Blake, but I've always noticed that them as you're kindest to has the least gratitude, and adopted children are sure to bring trouble on the family."

"As for me, I've been expecting it all along," said Miss Tucker, who was president of the Female Mission and Charity Association. "I noticed the way Lizzie Gray and that Mr. Parker looked at each other in the church Sunday night; and Tom Blake noticed it, too, for he appeared awful glum, and got up and went out before anybody else—straight before the blessing was spoke. I remember I said to myself, 'Elizabeth Gray and Orville Parker don't make a runaway match before long, then I'm no saint!'"

"If some folks would attend more to the sermons in church, and less to the looks and doings of other folks," said Mrs.

Harden, addressing nobody in particular, but looking straight before her with a stony gaze, "they'd be considerable more saints than they are likely to become other ways."

Miss Tucker glanced appealing at Mrs. Peters, and put on a martyr-like expression.

"I can excuse you, ma'am," she said, with great politeness, and a compassionate glance toward Elvira Jane, "considering how badly you must feel about this matter. It isn't many of us can bear disappointments with patience and Christian meekness and fortitude."

Mrs. Harden's countenance certainly expressed neither meekness nor patience, but her reply was averted by a sudden exclamation from Patty, who was staring out of the window at sundry curious and inquisitive faces of passersby, peering about the front garden palings.—

"Lor', mum, they're coming! Mister Tom—and Mister Joe, too."

Joe Harden was hurrying up the road from one direction and Tom Blake driving from another.

The two young men met at the gate and after exchanging a few words Tom left his wagon in the yard and they entered the kitchen together.

Tom's face was white while Joe's was as red as his mother's.

"Well, Joe," said Deacon Blake, hastily stepping forward.

Joe answered in a hard, sharp way—"Parker left this morning at five o'clock. He hired a buggy. He didn't say where he was going, but Larry, the milkman, met him near the meadow bridge, driving with a lady, who, he is sure, was Lizzie."

"But in that case, where was she all night?"

Joe sternly shook his head.

Mrs. Blake burst into a passion of weeping.

Tom, meanwhile, had taken something from a small box on the top shelf of the closet, and was closely examining it at the window.

"Oh, Tom!" cried Elvira Jane, "what do you mean to do with that dreadful thing?"

Tom made no reply.

His lips were firmly set, and he put it in his breast pocket and turned toward the door.

"Tom, my son!" cried his mother, seizing his arm. "Oh, Joe, stop him! There'll be murder somewhere! He'll kill that Parker!"

"If he don't," said Joe, deliberately, as he carefully selected a stout horsewhip from a number hanging in the closet—"if he don't succeed in killing him, then I'll finish him myself. Come along, Tom!"

Elvira Jane screamed, and Mrs. Harden and Mrs. Peters made a sudden elephantine rush and placed their ample forms against the kitchen door.

Mrs. Blake threw herself into a rocking chair with loud wailing, and with tightly clenched hands, mouth screwed up and eyes double their natural size danced about the room on tiptoe.

"Stand aside, mother! There's something trying to get in here," said Joe, as the door was pushed from without.

And wrenching it open, despite the resistance of the two stout ladies, he threw it wide, while the eyes of all the excited group turned thitherward.

Every one uttered an exclamation. There stood Lizzie, bright and rosy, her hat, hanging on her back by its strings, her curly hair all disordered by the wind, and in her hands a little basket, the contents of which was covered over with fresh green leaves.

At sight of the unexpected group her face assumed an expression of the utmost astonishment.

"Oh, Lizzie, Lizzie!" cried her aunt, starting up, "where have you been?"

"Where have I been?" repeated Lizzie, in a bewildered tone. Why, to the meadow bridge wood, to get strawberries."

And she lifted the leaves and displayed the red fruit beneath.

A dead silence ensued. Everybody looked at each other, but no one spoke until Miss Tucker inquired, half incredulously—

"Who went with you?"

"Mrs. Lamb and the girls, and Frank Lamb and Mr. Parker," answered Lizzie, unhesitatingly.

"Oh, Mr. Parker!" said Miss Tucker, with a significant smile and toss of her head.

"And pray," said Mrs. Harden, severely, "how was it that he offered you a seat in his buggy instead of one of the others?"

Lizzie hesitated, and smiled, and glanced towards Elvira Jane. Then she stopped and whispered a word or two in Mrs. Harden's ear whose countenance instantly cleared.

"You've given us a dreadful fright, Lizzie," said Mrs. Blake, beginning to cry again, but this time from pure relief and happiness.

"Yes," said Mrs. Peters, with a broad smile breaking over her face, "yea, we all thought you and Mr. Parker had run away to get married. Ain't it ridiculous?"

Lizzie looked around, with an indignant flush sufficing her face.

Uncle Joe sat down and broke into a wild laugh.

Even Elvira Jane smiled, for she had caught Lizzie's whisper.

And while they were all laughing Lizzie

(Continued on Page 5.)

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